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GERMAN MANPOWER AND CASUALTIES:
CRITICISM OF BRITISH JIC (44) 362

Description

An examination of the conclusions of a British JIC paper on German army strength, and a critique of the method by which the conclusions were reached.

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SECRETSUMMARY

1. The principal conclusion of the British paper is that the strength of the German army on 30 June 1944 was 7,095,000 men, or 200,000 above the corresponding British estimate for 1 October 1943. In view of the losses suffered by the German army between these two dates, it is felt that this estimate is not accurate. The OSS estimate of German army strength as of 1 July 1944 is 4.9 million men.

2. The British method of estimating strength is to take a figure for strength at a base period, and to add subsequent recruitment and subtract subsequent losses in order to reach a current estimate.

3. It is believed that the base period selected by the British -- June 1941 -- cannot provide an accurate basis for calculation.

4. It is believed that the British figure for recruitments since June 1941 does not rest on adequate evidence and cannot be accepted.

5. Despite differences in method, the British and OSS estimates of permanent losses do not differ greatly.

6. Detailed comments on the specific figures in the British paper are presented in full.

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GERMAN MANPOWER AND CASUALTIES:
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I. INTRODUCTION

OSS criticism of the British JIC paper German Manpower and Casualties, (44) 362 bears on three aspects of the report, (1) the general conclusions reached; (2) the method of deriving the estimates; and (3) the specific figures used. These criticisms are presented in the three sections below.

II. THE GENERAL CONCLUSIONS OF THE PAPER

The principal conclusion of the British paper appears to be that the strength of the German army on 30 June 1944 was 7,095,000 men. This figure is higher by about 200,000 men than the corresponding British estimate for October 1943¹, and is considerably higher than any previous British estimate of German army strength. The British paper notes a general lowering of standards in the German armed forces. While there is no specific appraisal of the overall fighting strength of the German forces, it is clearly implied that there was a moderate decline in fighting power between October 1943 and June 1944. The British paper undertakes

1. Given as 6,900,000 for 1 October 1943. Report of the Combined Conference on German Manpower held in Washington, 9-20 December 1943, 19 December 1943, para 5.

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to carry the estimate forward to 31 December 1944, at which time it is anticipated that German army strength may be about 6,258,000.

The conclusions of the British paper square but poorly with the salient features of the German position as it appeared on 18 August 1944. The year preceding that date had seen an unbroken series of German defeats, which had carried German permanent losses to more than 6 million men, and had broken the offensive power of German arms. During this year scores of the best German divisions were destroyed, and the remaining fighting units had fallen so far below prescribed strength as seriously to impair their combat value. Discouragement and defeatism spread through all ranks of the German forces, including the High Command.

None of these developments is reflected in the present British paper, and the decisive development -- the decline in actual strength -- is explicitly denied.

As an index of the relative magnitude of the difference involved, it may be noted that the British paper indicates an increase in strength of the German army between 1 October 1943 and 30 June 1944 of approximately 2 percent, while OSS estimates of the change in strength in the same period indicate a decrease of about

10 percent.

III. THE METHOD OF DERIVING THE ESTIMATES

The principal conclusions of the British paper stem from the estimates of numerical strength; it is appropriate therefore to follow the development of these estimates in some detail.

The British method of estimating German strength is known as the intake method. The final estimate is derived from strength in a base period, plus subsequent recruitment and minus subsequent permanent losses.

Examination in detail of the validity of the British method therefore requires determination of the accuracy of (1) the estimate of strength at the base period; (2) the estimates of recruitment since the base period; and (3) the estimates of permanent losses since the base period.

A. German Army Strength at the Base Period

The British have taken as a base figure the estimated strength in June 1941, given as 6.8 million men.¹

Changes since that date reflect intakes minus losses

1. More precisely, the base figure is 6,050,000 for 1 January 1941, but this figure appears to be the June figure of 6.8 millions corrected back to January by subtraction of 750,000 call-ups, January to June. See M. I. 14 BM/496.

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only; no subsequent attempt has been made to estimate strength directly.

Unfortunately, the British base figure relates to a period when information on the German army was at the lowest ebb. The figure of 6.8 millions was the product (rounded) of 250 divisions times 27,000 men per division.¹ The figure of 250 divisions was a very round guess, which was subsequently discarded in favor of a figure of 290 to 300 divisions. The figure of 27,000 men per division was supposed to allow for personnel in non-divisional units, about which almost nothing was known at the time the estimate was made.

The strength of the German armed forces on 17 May 1939, the date of the Census can be estimated within a few thousands at 1,697,000.² From that date forward information is lacking up to May 1942, when reliable intelligence on the organization and disposition of the German forces began to come through. It is consequently believed that the British figure for strength as of June 1941 -- like any other figure for strength at that time -- does not provide an accurate basis for calcula-

1. For a detailed analysis of the derivation of the 6.8 million estimate see Attachment I Are British War Office and HIS Estimates of German Army Strength Reliable?

2. Attachment II.

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tions as to strength in subsequent periods.

B. Intakes since the Base Period

The British estimates of intakes since the base date are no firmer than the base estimate itself. Actually, no direct evidence exists for the magnitude of call-ups for any period since May 1939. It is a safe assumption that virtually all fit men of the incoming classes have been called up; the number of older men called up is not known, nor is there any material to support the roughest direct estimate of the latter.

The subject paper states that "An increase in strength at 30 June 1944 over 1 October 1943 was to be expected, as the result of the normal procedure of high intakes in the autumn and winter to provide trained men for the spring and summer campaigns."

It is doubtful if these "normal procedures" to provide men for the "spring and summer campaigns" have applied in Germany since 1941. The German armies have been involved in heavy action during every summer, autumn, and winter since 1941. Furthermore, since 1942 the initiative has been firmly with the Allies. Whatever seasonal pattern of recruitment there may have been in pre-war times, it is most unlikely to have persisted into 1943. Since July 1942 the German Government

and High Command have been living from hand to mouth. There is furthermore good documentary evidence¹ that German recruitment has followed no seasonal pattern. The Germans have endeavored to make good such losses as those suffered at Stalingrad by calling up such suitable manpower as they had, whenever they could find it.

C. Permanent Losses since the Base Period

The third item in the computation is permanent losses. The American objections to the British method of estimating German losses have already been stated,² and will not be repeated here. In spite of a radically different approach to the problem, the British results do not differ greatly from the American estimates.

D. Establishment Strength

The criticisms above are directed towards the British method of deriving actual strength, which is evidently the point of main importance. There are, however, certain objections to the estimates of Establishment

1. See: Report from Captured Personnel and Material Branch. Information on German Military Manpower as of June based on Statistics of 12,000 P/Ws captured in the first 24 days of the attack in Normandy. British Source. Compiled 16 July 1944 for the A.C. of S. G-2. R.A. Osmon D.W.H. Brig. Gen. Chief Military Intelligence Service.

2. This subject was discussed at length at the Washington Conference.

Strength contained in the subject paper. Establishment Strength of the army is estimated at 7.7 millions; this estimate evidently ignores the general reduction in prescribed strength provided for in orders of the German High Command in October 1943.¹ These orders reduced the prescribed strength of infantry, light, and mountain divisions, as well as many types of smaller units. While the application of this order has not been universal, it has been carried out to a very large extent. Nor is any notice taken of the subsequently available documentary and operational evidence on this point, much of which is of excellent quality, and all of which indicates a substantial reduction in establishment strength since October 1943.²

E. Combat Manpower

It is noted that the subject of combat manpower is not dealt with in the subject paper. One of the main

1. Allgemeine Heeresmitteilungen 1 October 1943. Quoted in AFHQ Intelligence Notes No. 41. 11 January 1944.

2. See for instance: AFHQ, Intelligence Notes, No. 41, 11 January 1944; No. 67, 1 August 1944; and No. 69, 15 August 1944. SHAEF, Intelligence Notes, No. 9, 11 May 1944; No. 17, 6 July 1944; No. 19, 20 July 1944; No. 20, 27 July 1944.

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achievements of the Washington Combined Conference on German Manpower of December 1943 was the establishment of a firm basis for estimating the German combat manpower position. The Conference recognized that the supply of combat manpower was the crucial question for Germany. It is regrettable that the present British paper has nothing to say on this subject.

In the absence of any specific discussion of combat manpower¹ it is impossible to discover how the British would divide their estimated army strength of 7.1 millions between combat-fit and limited-service or over-age men. Given the magnitude and age-distribution of permanent losses, on which British estimates do not differ from American, the approximate number of over-age men implied in the British paper follows necessarily from the strength figure. Since losses have been sustained almost entirely by the fit personnel of combat age, it can be deduced from the British estimates that about 3.7 million men, well over half of the whole German army, consists of foreigners, over-age men and men of limited service quality. On the OSS estimates, only

1. Combat manpower was defined at the Washington Conference in conformity with the German regulations and practice -- i.e., fit men, Classes 1906 and younger.

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about 1.5 million men fall into these categories while 3.4 million men in the army are estimated as combat fit. OSS has long maintained the opinion that the Germans could make little effective use of over-age men. The OSS estimates show a low figure for over-age men in the German armed forces. Recent evidence on this point has appeared in the form of an analysis of the ages of 12,000 prisoners taken in the first month of the Normandy campaign.¹ These men were mainly from Coast Defense divisions which were indisputably second-line in quality. It is in such divisions that the over-age men would be found, if they actually are in the German army. However, less than 17 percent of the 12,000 prisoners were over 37 years of age.

The British estimates of 1943 intake are based on the assumption that almost 23 percent of the 1943 intake consisted of men of the class of 1896 and older. Yet among those of the 12,000 prisoners who were inducted in 1943, less than 3.5 percent were men of the class of 1900 and older; probably less than 2 percent were of the class of 1896 and older.² These figures cannot be recon-

1. Report from Captured Personnel and Material Branch, referred to above, page 5.

2. 1.54 percent of the entire 12,000 were of the class of 1896 and over.

ciled with the British strength estimates, which are based on the assumption that the Germans have kept their armies at full strength through the call-up of over-age men.

F. Projection of Strength

A considerable part of the argument in the British paper is devoted to projecting the estimates to 31 December 1944. The value of this projection is doubtful. The European war had already entered the decisive period by 18 August, the date of the subject paper, and an appraisal based on straight-line projection of trends obtaining in the pre-invasion period is necessarily of limited interest.

G. General Evaluation of Method

It is difficult to see the advantage of the intake or indirect method of estimating German strength as used by the British. This method does not avoid the problem of a direct estimate but merely refers the direct estimate back to a base date for which little information is available. To this uncertain base figure there is added an intake figure which has little to support it, and there is subtracted a loss figure which is at best subject to substantial error.

A more promising approach would be the direct method,

in which identified units are assigned specific strengths according to the most recent intelligence, and a total strength estimate reached directly from estimated unit strengths. This method results in an estimated strength for the German army on 1 July 1944 of 4.9 millions,¹ compared with the British estimate of 7.1 millions.

IV. COMMENT ON SPECIFIC FIGURES.

The following are more detailed comments on the specific figures used in the subject paper. The number and letter references are to the sections and paragraphs of that report.

A.1. British and OSS estimates of permanent losses in the German armed forces are summarized in the following table:

	<u>British JIC</u>	<u>OSS</u>
Permanent Battle Losses		
1 October 1943 -		
31 December 1943	265,000	447,000
Permanent Battle Losses		
1 January 1944 -		
30 June 1944	1,020,000	891,000
Permanent Non-Battle Losses		
1 October 1943 -		
30 June 1944	<u>215,000</u>	<u>213,000</u>
<u>Total</u>	1,500,000	1,551,000*
* Includes 60,000 foreigners.		

1. R & A No. 2349 Strength of the German Army, 1 June 1944. Strength for 1 June is given as 5.1 millions; the present estimate of 4.9 millions is corrected to 1 July 1944.

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Thus, for the period 1 October 1943 - 30 June 1944, the British and OSS estimates of permanent losses agree in totals. However, a breakdown of permanent battle losses by period reveals that the estimates are substantially different in composition. For purposes of comparison within this category, it is unfortunate that the British figures are grouped in time-periods wholly unrelated to the nature of the fighting and thus of losses. The periods used are: 1 October 1943 - 31 December 1943 and 1 January 1944 - 30 June 1944. This artificial grouping limits comment to noting the disagreement and prevents any examination in detail of the two estimates.

Given the arbitrary nature of the time-periods in the British JIC paper any rates expressed for the two periods are of nominal significance only. These rates are noted only for the purpose of revealing the wide difference between the British and OSS estimates of permanent battle losses. The subject paper states that the rate for the first half of 1944 was almost double that of the fourth quarter of 1943. Broken down in a similar manner, the OSS estimate shows no difference in the rates for the two periods. Though lacking the material necessary for a detailed comparison of the estimates, it can be pointed out that OSS estimates the losses in each of the

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three months of the last quarter of 1943 to be among the heaviest of the war until 1 July 1944.

A.2. OSS estimates recruitment into the German armed forces at 745,000 men compared with the British estimate of 1,750,000. A detailed comparison of the sources of the intakes is presented in the following table:

	<u>British JIC</u>	<u>OSS</u>
1926 class	500,000	276,000
1927 class	450,000	264,000
Comb-outs, older classes	500,000	45,000
Foreigners	<u>300,000</u>	<u>160,000</u>
	1,750,000	745,000

OSS is in agreement with the opinion stated in the subject paper that an estimate of recruitment during this period is "necessarily subject to a considerable margin of error." In fact, there is no direct evidence for the magnitude of recruitment. It is a safe assumption that young men are called up as they reach the minimum military age. For the call-up of older classes, there is no reliable direct evidence, and the order of magnitude of these call-ups is in doubt. Estimates of the number of older men called up can best be derived from the actual strength of the German army, for which

there is a considerable amount of reliable evidence.

It is noted that the British estimate of the yield of the 1926 class is lower than that made by OSS. OSS estimates that one-half and not the entire class of 1927 has been incorporated into the armed forces as of 30 June 1944. The British figure for the yield of the 1927 class is lower than the OSS estimate. It should be particularly noted that the question of which classes have been incorporated is not relevant to the OSS strength estimates, which are derived directly from the units. But the rate of incorporation of the new classes does affect the number of combat-fit men available.

The paper's estimate of comb-outs is broken down into two categories: 100,000 men born after 1896 and 400,000 men born before 1897. The comparable OSS estimate for the first of these categories is 45,000 men. OSS estimates that there have been no call-ups of men in the 1896 and older classes. OSS estimates that a total of 160,000 foreigners have been brought into the German armed forces during the period as against the War Office estimate of 300,000.

A.3. A summary of OSS estimates reveals a decline in the strength of the German armed forces amounting to 800,000 men between 1 October 1943 and 30 June 1944. The

comparable British figure is an increase of 250,000 men. OSS has in the past accepted British estimates of the strength of the GAF and the German Navy. OSS has no independent estimates of the strength of these services. The following comparative table summarizes strength estimates as of 30 June 1944:

	<u>British JIC</u>	<u>OSS</u>
Army	7,095,000	4,900,000
Navy	340,000	340,000
GAF	800,000	800,000
Flak	<u>985,000</u>	<u>985,000</u>
	9,220,000	7,025,000

While OSS has no independent estimate of airforce strength, it is believed that the British figure is excessive in view of the increasing utilization, since the beginning of 1943, of air force personnel for ground operations with the Army.

A.4. As noted above (A.3.), OSS estimates that the German Armed Forces have declined in strength during the period. It is believed that recruiting for the armed forces has not followed any seasonal pattern as indicated in the British paper. It seems probable that the rate of incorporation of foreign elements into the armed forces steadily declined over the period. OSS

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estimates that the actual strength of the armed forces has steadily declined throughout the period.

A.5. The British estimate of Table of Organization requirements appears to be based on figures agreed upon with US representatives last October. It has since become known that the German High Command initiated extensive downward reductions in the prescribed strength of the bulk of the divisional units of the German Army at about this same date. This decision is believed to have been due to a grave shortage in Germany of combat-fit manpower. The time-lag involved in securing information bearing on extensive organizational changes in prescribed strength requirements; and, more particularly, the fact of a heavy net loss rate per month in the German Army make it impossible to use TO requirements as a basis for estimating actual strength.

The OSS estimate of actual strength also includes the "hospital pool". The OSS estimate of downgraded is 870,000 as against the British figure of "over 1 million men". OSS agrees that medical standards have been lowered.

B.6. OSS estimates permanent losses in the German armed forces since 31 May 1944 as follows:

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June - 207,000
July - 334,000
August - 492,000
1,033,000

The magnitude of the permanent losses during this period together with the acceleration of the monthly loss rate make worthless any projection of German losses based on the rate obtaining during the first half of 1944. OSS estimates that excess of permanent losses over recruitment amounted to approximately 450,000 men in August 1944. The only significant source of manpower left to the German armed forces during the remainder of 1944 is a part of the 1927 class. Germany's loss of control over satellites and Allies indicates that foreigners will make little, if any, contribution to Germany's armed forces. OSS estimates that the comb-out yield of combat-fit manpower will be negligible.

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